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Truth is no stranger to fiction

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va. To promote my career as a novelist with aspirations of selling at least one book to someone other than my Aunt Lucy, I decided to boost my fictive credentials by submitting a very short story to Americas leading literary journal The ButcherBlock Review of Really Indecipherable Literature and Obscure References.

The Review is so high-brow that it rarely agrees to publish. Its bylaws state that each issue can contain no more than 24 pages with a maximum of 43 words and 16 punctuation marks.

My submission pushed this envelope. But I hoped the editor would make an exception based on my fetching smile.

Once upon a time, three little pigs were sent into the world to seek their fortunes.

The first little pig met a man carrying a load of straw. Please Mr. Man, give me some straw so that I can build a house. Sure, said the man.

This little pig built a house of straw.

A big bad wolf came by and said, Little pig, let me in, let me in. The little pig said: Not by the hair of my chinny-chinchin.

This response puzzled the wolf who observed that the pig was too young to shave.

So the wolf huffed and puffed, and he blew the house down. Then he gobbled up the first little pig.

The second little pig repeated this scenario with a man carrying a load of sticks. The big bad wolf blew this stick

house down, leading to a second meal.

The third little pig walked down the same road and met a man carrying a load of bricks. He asked for bricks and used them to build a house.

The big bad wolf huffed and puffed, but he was unable to blow down this house.

So the wolf jumped on the roof and wiggled down the chimney.

The third little pig pointed his Smith & Wesson 500 .50-Cal. Magnum at the sooty visitor and said:

You wanted my flesh down to my squeal. Either be my partner or be my next meal.

The pig and the wolf made a fortune on Wall Street where they sold house kits of straw and sticks to buyers with bricks in their heads.

So successful were they that Arturo Di Modica cast them in bronze and placed them beside his Charging Bull in Bowling Green Park near Wall Street.

He named their sculpture, Two Tails in a Fountain.

I received the following response from The Reviews editor, Prunelle Harridan:

Seltzer (you are not worth a Dear or a Mister):

I have circulated your story, or whatever it is, to my assistant, associate adjunct male editor, Clive Byrddrop, as well as to two proteinstarved graduate students who hang around our offices looking for food wrappers to lick clean. Your work is not for us, even were it to be cut to an acceptable length of no more than three words. In an act of inexplicable generosity, I am sending

along our internal email exchange in hope that you will never again darken our editorial door.

Harridan: Once upon a time—Oh dear me! I ask you! We cannot compromise to the obvious when opaque is our minimum. In which century will this author force us to wallow? And are these American pigs? European pigs? Pot-bellies? What?

Byrddrop: Maybe this is adult fiction. I sense kinky sexual undercurrents flowing through the narrative. Do you think this pig story is parabolic?

Harridan: The Review does not publish snouty parables. My brow will not droop to conquer.

Byrddrop: Im sorry, Pru. The storys unmentioned sexuality overloaded my senses.

Harridan: What *are* you blithering about?

Byrddrop: Sex is central. I can feel the tingle. If not between the lines, certainly in the margins.

Harridan: This is not a story about sex. Its about gender. Little pigs are shoats. Little castrated male pigs are barrows. Are these three pigs eunuchs or are they not? It makes a difference to this reader.

Byrddrop: Why do we continue to demonize wolves in our culture? This story would work just as well with a big, bad armadillo.

Harridan: This story is not about good and bad. Its about gender. Where are the women? What is the role of women in this tale? How would women be impacted by these events?

Byrddrop: Well, Im sure each character had a mother.

Harridan: Exactly. This is another blame-the-mother story! It is she who sends -- shes probably a teenage, unmarried Mom living in confined quarters, not running free-range like me -- her three uneducated, unsophisticated male runts into the world to beg for affordable housing. Because of her negligence, two of her three sons are eaten alive by a predatory male, the same cad

with whom the third prospers.

Byrddrop: The plot borders on conspiracy, even sibling cannibalism by far-fetched association! This is heady stuff!

Harridan: Not to mention, which I will, that the wolfs mother stands symbolically responsible for all of the worlds rotten children.

Byrddrop: And not to mention the sexual symbolism of a .50-Cal. handgun pointed at a wolf in wolfs clothing.

Harridan: Fathers, in the male sense of the term, are totally spared in this narrative. And the only nice characters are males who dont act like men and give part of their loads to undeserving pigs? Why does this author hate women?

Byrddrop: I like wolves. I prefer endangered-but-emotionally-complex furies in my fiction.

Harridan: Im sure these pigs are male chauvinists. They only ask men for residential construction materials. Why not ask women?

Byrddrop: Huh?

Harridan: Does any pig meet a woman carrying a load of anything? Women always carry more than their share of all loads. Why not meet one carrying flowers, or quilts or dresses that are out of fashion? Why is it that these pigs always meet loaded men on this road?

Byrddrop: Im not sure.

Harridan: And why does this wolf not include female pigs on his menu? Why are women discriminated against, even as victims?

Byrddrop: Youre right. I just never realized that males like me were so dominant.

Harridan: Thats not exactly my point.

Byrddrop: So you dont see this story as venting anti-sustainability prejudice against houses built with renewable resources like bales of straw and sticks of wood?

Harridan: Bricks, my dear Byrddrop, are very male.

Byrddrop: This author hates renewables. Whats he got agains t the huffing and puffing of wind energy? And then he allows juveniles to use handguns to get their way. Shameful!

Harridan: I find it far-fetched that three little porkers walk down a road and meet three different men carrying three different loads, each of whom willingly gives some of his treasure to a talking pig for the asking. Come on! If I ran into a talking pig, Id p ut him in a cage and charge admission.

Byrddrop: I see it differently. We have, as a society, embraced the idea of universal entitlement, for everything, for everybody. The three pigs ask, and the three men give without charging a dime. Society compelled these men to share their hard-earned loads with total strangers...of a different species no less. This story shows how we are waging war on kind-hearted, Republican men! Obama is behind this.

Harridan: From whom these male pigs wangle their construction materials is not significant to the plot. Ive chan ged my mind on that. **Byrddrop:** Young people should rent first, not build. Everyone knows that. No wolf could blow down a top-floor unit in a 10-story apartment building. These pigs must have gotten federal financing at zero percent forever with zero principal repayment.

Harridan: What is important is the symbolism of a brick house being the Trump-like setting where males make deals with each other at my expense!

Byrddrop: Totally! You are brilliant! By the way, have you considered my request to be paid in cash rather than in promises of future footnotes?

Harridan: This story ignores the contribution of women to the singlefamily, residential housing industry. And do I need to mention that a woman would never huff and puff at male-made structures? She would have invited each pig over to her place for a home-cooked meal, if you catch my drift.

Byrddrop: You are too sly for words. What about the ending?

Harridan: Why does every coming-of-age story about male pigs end up with them succeeding on Wall Street? Do boy heroes never fail?

Byrddrop: I think you'll agree that the first two male pigs out of the box failed.

Harridan: They succeeded as meals.

Byrddrop: Yes, of course. I should have thought about it from that perspective. But consider this. The story says that Arturo Di Modica cast them in bronze.... There is only one interpretation: The sculptor used both the pig and the wolf as live sacrifices. Its Wall Street consuming its own. Obama must be behind this, too!

Harridan: You have taken me so deep into the depths of meaning that I'm getting the bends. Might this be a story of art triumphing over money? Aesthetics over business.

Byrddrop: No. I really think this is a story about prejudice—a gainst wolves and the men who love them. Its also a call to resist federal housing programs for underage pigs asking for a handout.

Harridan: No. This story is about the authors hatred of women. The feminine does not triumph over the masculine, as our submission guidelines require.

Byrddrop: The author hates

wolves! **Harridan:** He hates

WOMEN!

Byrddrop: You are an over-educated, rigid-minded Stalinist.

Harridan: You are a poop-head.

I phoned The Review after reading these comments. Is Ms. Harridan in? I asked the receptionist. I'm sorry. She's on her honeymoon. How about Mr. Byrddrop?

He's on the same honeymoon, he giggled. They're

snorkeling together on the Great Barrier Wreath.

Dont you mean reef?

He paused, uncomfortably: No, I do not.

Oh. I guess I dont have much of a hear f or language.